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HUMAN MONOCLONAL ANTIBODIES SPECIFIC FOR  
HEPATITIS C VIRUS (HCV) E2 ANTIGEN

Cross-Reference to Related Application

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This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. application Serial No. 08/635,109, filed April 19, 1996, from which priority is claimed pursuant to 35 U.S.C. §120 and which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

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Technical Field

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The present invention relates to compositions derived from immunoglobulin molecules specific for the hepatitis C virus (HCV). More particularly, the invention is related to recombinant human monoclonal antibodies which are capable of specifically binding with HCV E2 antigen.

Background

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Hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection occurs throughout the world and is the major cause of transfusion-associated hepatitis. There are an estimated 150,000 new cases of HCV infection each year in the United States. The seroprevalence of anti-HCV antibodies in blood donors from around the world has been shown to vary between 0.02 and 1.23%, with rates in some countries as high as about 19%. In addition to being the predominate cause of transfusion-induced hepatitis, HCV is also a common cause of hepatitis in individuals exposed to blood or blood products. Thus, recipients of

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